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C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 001393

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV ECON AR
SUBJECT: ARGENTINA: SAN LUIS GOVERNOR SAYS GOA LACKS MASTER PLAN

Classified By: Ambassador E. Anthony Wayne for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Ambassador Wayne met with San Luis Governor and 2007 presidential candidate Rodriguez Saa on October 1. A dissident Peronist and critic of the Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (CFK) administration, Rodriguez Saa expressed his frustration at the current political situation, alleging the lack of a "master plan" for domestic and foreign policy and describing the GOA's foreign policy as the "worst ever." The Ambassador asked why San Luis province, which is among the provinces that receives the lowest proportion of federal revenue-sharing, appears to enjoy a healthier economy than other provinces. Rodriguez Saa cited generalized corruption and a dearth of long-term financial planning as contributing factors behind the poorer economic situation in other provinces. The Governor did not discuss his presidential aspirations and for now appears focused on his province's priorities and launching his new political coalition, "Another Country is Possible." He may calculate that criticizing the administration could bolster his public image while dissociating him from the Kirchners' lackluster policies. The Ambassador advised Rodriguez Saa of his plans to visit San Luis in late November. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Ambassador Wayne met with San Luis Governor and 2007 presidential candidate Alberto Rodriguez Saa on October 1. The Governor's advisor, Alfredo Barzola, accompanied him. Polcouns and Poloff (notetaker) also attended.

Frustration with the Administration

¶3. (SBU) Rodriguez Saa remarked that he maintains little dialogue with the national government, adding that his constituency is "annoyed" with the policies of President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner's (CFK) administration. He alleged that the GOA lacks a "master plan" for domestic and foreign policy. An outspoken critic of the CFK administration's handling of the farm conflict, Rodriguez Saa argued that the national government should adopt a "hands-off policy" to enable farmers to capitalize on historically high international commodity prices to invest in expanded production. In his view, the rural sector's participation in upcoming 2009 interim elections would be a positive development.

Looking to 2009

¶4. (SBU) Rodriguez Saa predicted that the ruling Victory Front (FpV) coalition will suffer a large electoral loss in the 2009 mid-term legislative elections because of the CFK administration's poor performance. In referring to his recent efforts to form a new political coalition called

"Another Country is Possible," the Governor expressed optimism that his party would perform well in the 2009 elections. (Note: In September 2008, Rodriguez Saa announced his plans to run in the 2011 presidential elections under his new coalition. Although very popular in San Luis and neighboring provinces, he only received 7.71 percent of the votes nationwide in the 2007 presidential race.)

A Foreign Policy Low-Point

¶15. (SBU) The Governor described the administration's foreign policy approach as the "worst ever." He remarked that Argentina's ongoing conflict with Uruguay over a pulp mill plant is "unforgivable" and described Argentina's relationship with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez as "tragicomic" and an enormous mistake.

Priorities for his Province

¶16. (SBU) Rodriguez Saa enthusiastically described his goals for his province to include expanding public access to computers, tapping into alternative energy sources, and investing in infrastructure and education. He said he hopes to accomplish these priorities without taking on new provincial debt. He expressed optimism about the province's ability to develop and utilize alternative energy sources, including solar and methane from waste recycling. The Ambassador asked why San Luis province, which is among the provinces that receives the lowest proportion of federal revenue-sharing, appears to enjoy a healthier economy than other provinces. Rodriguez Saa cited generalized corruption and a dearth of long-term financial planning as contributing factors behind the poorer economic situation in other provinces.

Bio Note

¶17. (SBU) Rodriguez Saa was reelected to his post in August 2007 with almost 85 percent of the votes. In a July 2008 poll published in the Argentine financial daily "El Cronista," he ranked number five out of provincial governors in terms of popularity among his constituents, receiving a 69 percent approval rating. From 2003 to 2007, Rodriguez Saa served his first term as Governor. He was Chief of Staff in the San Luis Cabinet from February to December 2001. From 1983 to 1994, he was a national Senator for San Luis province. Born in 1949, Rodriguez Saa has a law degree from the University of Buenos Aires. His brother, Adolfo, preceded him in the gubernatorial seat and for one week in 2001 served as Argentina's interim President. The Governor has three children.

Comment

¶18. (C) The Governor did not discuss his presidential aspirations and for now appears focused on his province's priorities and launching his new political coalition, "Another Country is Possible." Rodriguez Saa may calculate that criticizing the administration could bolster his public image while dissociating him from the Kirchners' lackluster policies. The Governor was warm and friendly, talking energetically about his priorities, his unique house (which incorporates recycled material), and his desire to expand public access to computers. The meeting provided an excellent opportunity to establish rapport prior to the Ambassador's late November visit to San Luis.

WAYNE